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United Nations Development Programme Expands Yasuni-ITT Donor Initiative to Prevent Oil Drilling in Ecuadorian Amazon

Global supporters can now make small contributions to help preserve one of earth's most biodiverse spots - a potential treasure trove of undiscovered scientific and medical discoveries

NEW YORK, Sept. 12, 2011 /PRNewswire/ -- With only four months remaining to raise \$100 million, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) announced today that it is now accepting donations of all sizes to its trust fund to preserve in perpetuity a vital section of Ecuador's Yasuni National Park in the Amazon Rainforest, under which lie nearly 1 billion barrels of oil. The effort, part of Ecuador's Yasuni-ITT Initiative, seeks to channel global support to save this unique piece of land that could hold the key to untold medical and scientific discoveries. Donations can be made at www.yasunisupport.org.



A Hoatzin, a tropical bird native to South America, watches as visitors make their way through Ecuador's Yasuni National Park in August, 2011. Yasuni is one of the most biodiverse places in the world, with countless species of wondrous mammal, bird, insect, and tree life. A vast oil discovery under the park means that many of these species now face extinction, unless the international community helps support Ecuador save Yasuni and protect it from oil drilling.

The Yasuni -ITT Initiative, a plan put forth by the Government of Ecuador and officially supported by the UNDP, seeks to raise a total of \$100 million by the end of December. The Initiative was previously only open to governments and corporations pledging over \$100,000. Now, individuals and businesses wishing to contribute amounts as small as \$25 may become involved in this historic and unprecedented environmental endeavor to save one of the most biodiverse places in the world.

Actress Bo Derek, Goodwill Ambassador appointed by President Correa to the Yasuni-ITT Initiative, commented, "Extending this effort to private citizens who want to get involved at any level not only helps raise more money to protect this sacred land, but also raises awareness of how important Yasuni is to our world. People care deeply about the protection of Yasuni, and want to contribute whatever they can. Ultimately, increased small-donation participation helps us galvanize support and spread the word."

After 846 million barrels of crude oil were discovered underneath the Yasuni's Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini (ITT) oil fields, immense internal and external pressure was laid on the Ecuadorian government to commence extraction and exportation. In a country where a third of the population lives beneath the poverty line and oil easily accounts for a majority of export revenue, the \$7.2 billion worth of oil under Yasuni represents a financial lifeline

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for the developing nation. The people and government of Ecuador, however, prefer not to drill.

Proposing an alternative plan in 2006, Ecuador chose to forego half of the estimated \$7.2 billion in revenue and is instead appealing to the international community at large to help recoup the other half of the lost potential profits that selling the oil would bring in. Agreeing with the plan and partnering with Ecuador in 2010, the UNDP established a trust fund through which to administer fundraising. The raised funds will go towards investment in alternative energy, the objective being a complete overhaul of the country's energy matrix away from oil dependence. Funds will also go towards social programs in Ecuador and building infrastructure such as hospitals and schools.

Bisrat Aklilu, Head of the UNDP Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office, explained, "This project is one of a kind. The UNDP thought it deserved our full support, and by partnering with the government of Ecuador, we will be to ensure the funds are administered properly. The UNDP will also help guarantee reimbursement of funds in the event that Ecuador is forced to drill."

Recognized as one of the most biodiverse places on earth, Yasuni has a rich history of animal and environmental wealth. One of the only sections of the Amazon where life was virtually unaffected by the last Ice Age, Yasuni provides a unique look into just how far millennia of evolution and ecological co-habitation have brought us. Teeming with unparalleled levels of amphibian, bird, mammal, insect, and plant life, in addition to indigenous tribes living in voluntary seclusion, it is one of the world's most pristine reserves, and could hold untold medical and scientific discoveries. One hectare of land there contains more species of tree than in all of North America.

"Our country is beautiful, but many people are poor. They depend on oil money, but at the same time they don't want to harm their beloved nature," said Ivonne Baki, Chair of the Yasuni-ITT Commission and former Ecuadorian Ambassador to the United States. "We now need the support of all people around the world to stand up and do their part to help protect this treasure before it is too late."

Drilling for the oil in Yasuni would cause untold damage to the environment and the myriad species of life found there. It would release over 400 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere, significantly contributing to global warming. The associated deforestation and oil infrastructure alone would contribute another staggering 800 million metric tons of carbon emissions.

Meeting the fundraising goal of \$100 million by the end of the year will indicate whether or not the project is viable and if the international community is vested enough in preserving this untouched ecosystem. Originally appealing to foreign governments and international corporations pledging \$100,000 or more, the project is now accepting donations of all sizes in an effort to reach as many contributors as possible.

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Visit <http://www.yasunisupport.org> for more information and to contribute.

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